

ECUMENICAL PRESS SERVICE

Annual Subscription: \$3.00

17, ROUTE DE MALAGNOU, GENEVA

Printed in the U. S. A.

297 FOURTH AVENUE, NEW YORK 10

Tel.: GRamercy 5-3475 — Cable Address: "Worcil"

under the auspices of

the WORLD COUNCIL of CHURCHES (in process of formation)
the INTERNATIONAL MISSIONARY COUNCIL
the WORLD ALLIANCE for INTERNATIONAL FRIENDSHIP THROUGH THE CHURCHES
the WORLD ALLIANCE of YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATIONS
the WORLD'S YOUNG WOMEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION
the WORLD'S STUDENT CHRISTIAN FEDERATION
the WORLD'S SUNDAY SCHOOL ASSOCIATION



The aim of the Ecumenical Press Service is to keep its readers informed of trends of thought and opinion in and about the Churches and Christian movements. It is therefore not to be held responsible for opinions expressed in its news items.

No. 9

Fourteenth Year

March 7, 1947

Towards the Assembly of the World Council of Churches

The principal theme of the first Assembly of the World Council of Churches to be held in 1948 is: Man's Disorder and God's Design. It will be considered by four Commissions under four headings. We have already given short extracts of the reports prepared for Commissions I and II (see I.C.P.I.S. Nos. 41, 43, 1946). The third Commission, presided over by Professor Reinhold Nieburh (United States), has prepared a memorandum on "The Church and the Disorder of Society". Here are some passages, showing the task of this Commission:

"This third Commission will start with the fact of the disorder of society... While it is important to distinguish between different national and regional situations, there are common problems that in varying degrees can be found everywhere and which are fundamental to the present disorder of man's life. One of these is the deterioration of personal relationships through the breaking down of elemental forms of community... The other major problem is the effect of technological developments upon freedom, upon the possibility of democracy...

To find ways of serving at the same time justice, freedom and order will be the Christian's continuous problem... To be outraged by the denials of justice, to be radical in criticism, to be willing to yield exclusive privilege and power, to make concrete decisions and to participate in particular programmes and movements and yet to keep every particular social cause or movement from becoming absolute in its claims upon one - that is the responsibility of the Christians.

One of the most striking developments within the Churches during the past decade has been the almost universal recognition of the responsibility of Christians for the institutions of society... Wherever the movements of resistance to state tyranny, in Germany or in occupied lands, have shown strength they have done so because Churches and individual Christians have seen clearly that Christ is the Lord of all life and that public life, governments and institutions and the decisions of Christian citizens, must be kept under God's design as known through Christ. This does not mean that inevitable solutions of every political problem can be deduced from the law of love or that the Christian may not be forced to choose between evil alternatives that involve serious moral conflict, but that always he will see these alternatives for what they really are in relation to the mind of Christ and that he will make his choice in humble and penitent obedience to God's will as he understands it.

There are two quite different emphases that one must be prepared to find. There are those, on the one hand, who believe in the social responsibility of the Christian in every situation but who find very little positive Christian guidance concerning actual policies and programmes, and there are those on the other hand who discover direct implications of Christian love for social policy, or who stress immediately applicable principles of justice which have, as they believe, a definitely Christian sanction.

It will be necessary to study the ways in which the Churches are themselves involved in the disorder of society. The ambiguity of the Church as a divine-human community is to be seen clearly in this connection. The Church is so largely unconverted. It is an institution that in its economic life is closely intertwined with the economic practices of society at large. It reflects many of the social stratifications and conflicts of the world. Its own divisions frequently correspond with national, racial, and class divisions in society and hence it finds it very difficult to keep social groups that are in conflict together under the divine judgment or to be to them a minister of reconciliation...

Instead of discussing in somewhat abstract terms the Christian principles that should govern economic life... it is the intention of this commission to seek the best thought that has come from Christians who are in the midst of new political and economic experiments...

Another kind of experiment is the development in various countries of groups of Christian laymen who are in positions of responsibility for concrete decisions and who are seeking together Christian guidance concerning their own special vocations... There is little that the Church in its official teaching or the clergy can do apart from the participation of those who are immediately responsible for such decisions... The Church should try to disturb such laymen so that they will feel the need of seeking Christian guidance for their lives, and to give encouragement to those laymen who are already disturbed and who are engaged in those vocational experiments. This Commission will make this task a central concern in the hope that from the work done in connection with this Assembly a new emphasis may come within the life of the Church".

E.P.S. Geneva

UNITED STATES

Lenten Relief Appeal

A nation-wide Lenten appeal for overseas relief was made by the major Protestant Churches in the United States beginning on February 19th. Dr. Leslie B. Moss, promotion director of Church World Service, interdenominational agency for overseas relief and reconstruction, announces that councils of Churches, community Churches, and theological seminaries throughout the country will cooperate in the appeal which is designed to augment the present relief programme. In many communities union services will be held during the sacrificial period of Lent, and church members will be asked to give up luxuries in order to send gifts abroad.

E.P.S. Geneva

JAPAN

Educational Reconstruction

Paul H. Vieth, Professor of Christian Nurture at Yale University, chairman of the Commission on Educational Programme of the International Council of Religious Education, has been invited to serve for one year in the Civil Information and Education Section of the General Headquarters of the Supreme Command of Allied Powers to counsel with American and Japanese educational leaders in helping to give religious and moral content to democratic education. He expects to go to Japan about May 1, 1947.

Kagawa and the House of Peers.

Dr. Toyohiko Kagawa was appointed by the Emperor to the House of Peers nearly a year ago. The Allied authorities had been holding this up, along with some thirty others, pending investigation. The appointment has now been confirmed. However, there is only one more meeting before May 3rd, at which time the House of Peers ceases to be honorary and appointive and becomes elective.

The Rev. Kiyumi Ogawa, close associate of Kagawa, said that the latter is not interested primarily in politics, but believes that, in the present circumstances, religion should guide politics.

E.F.S. Geneva

INDIAIssues Confronting Christians

The National Christian Council of India, Burma and Ceylon, assembled in Nagpur on November 29, 1946, sent a "Message of Goodwill" to the country and another to the Church of India, Burma and Ceylon. Both messages have been made public on January 8, 1947. Here are some of their main passages:

From the message to the country:

"We, the representatives of the Churches and Missions cooperating in the National Christian Council of India, Burma and Ceylon meeting in Nagpur desire to place on record our gratification at the British Cabinet Mission foreshadowing the speedy attainment of independence by India, and welcome all the measures that have followed in pursuance of this aim. The Council welcomes the installation of the Interim Government and expresses its confidence that its administration will pave the way for the setting up of the proposed Constituent Assembly and for the statesmanlike conduct of its affairs. We look forward to the time when the two chief political parties will work together with that spirit of reconciliation and concord which is essential to India's future prosperity. We are happy to note that in setting up the present government an eminent member of our community has been included in the Cabinet. The Council reiterates the general feeling of Christians that they should seek no exclusive communal privileges. All that they ask is that, in common with all communities, they be granted that religious liberty which is of the essence of a fully democratic state...

"We, as a Council place our services unreservedly at the disposal of the Country and would gladly respond to any call from the country for any service that may be required of us and that we are able to render".

From the message of the Church of India, Burma and Ceylon:

"... Greatly as we have longed for unity, we are still far from that state of trust and cooperation among ourselves that should give us the strength needed for Christian action... We therefore urge Churches and congregations to increase their efforts to promote Church union and not to be hindered by non-essentials in achieving this objective. We rejoice at the great step taken in South India towards the attainment of Church union and pray that the same spirit may prompt action towards a similar attainment in other parts of India.

In many cases Christians have failed to uphold the standards of our religion in Church and political elections and have freely indulged in party rivalries and strife. It is with deep regret that we have heard of instance, not infrequent, of individual Christians succumbing to the temptations of public life. We beseech all our brethren to be ever mindfull of the name they bear and maintain it spotless as witness to their faith.

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2024

https://archive.org/details/eni-bulletin_1947-03-07_14_9

We extend our deep sympathy to fellow Christians in the State of Travancore and pray that the recent disabilities imposed on them may draw them closer together as they strive valiantly to uphold ideals of religious liberty...

There is no one of us who, in the presence of the heartrending events that have taken place in so many parts of India... does not feel humbled and saddened. In this critical situation we urge all Churches to organize groups that will serve as peace squads and relief parties... We request that pastors may constantly place this call before their congregations and that staffs and students in Christian colleges and schools may give themselves to creating right inter-communal relations..."

E.P.S. Geneva

ESTONIA

Restored Churches

According to "Religion and the People", monthly periodical published in Birmingham (England), the Lutheran Archdeacon of Tallinn, Ferdinand Jorgenson, stated recently that the badly damaged St. John's church in Tallinn was now completely restored.

Nicolas Kokla, Dean of the Orthodox Transfiguration Cathedral in the Estonian capital, told that the Estonian Bishopric included 132 parishes. "There are", he said, "10 Orthodox churches in Tallinn. St. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral was seriously damaged by the war. The Patriarch of Moscow allocated funds for its restoration, which is now complete".

E.P.S. Geneva

BULGARIA

Church and State

Since Bulgaria was declared a republic it has been in the process of working out its new constitution. Terms of the proposed constitution as drawn up by the Peoples Government provide that "the Church should be separated from the State and from education, that the people should be allowed freedom of conscience and freedom of religion and education should be taken over by secular bodies". Thereupon the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church sent a detailed memorandum to the government and Parliament.

This memorandum expressed the opposition felt by the Holy Synod to a separation of Church and State, this not so much from a religious and Church standpoint, as from the point of view of maintaining the "spiritual unity of the Bulgarian nation in its moral and cultural development", particularly in view of the fact that all the Bulgarian statesmen today, including the Communists, have openly and emphatically stated that the Bulgarian Orthodox Church has always been and still is a people's Church in the truest sense of the word, and that it is to this that the Bulgarian nation owes her education, her growth and also the rise of the Bulgarian State as it is today. Almost the entire population in Bulgaria belongs to the Bulgarian Orthodox Church; freedom of conscience and religion has always been guaranteed and respected in the Bulgarian State. "If, however, this separation nevertheless takes place, the Church insists that the basis on which this is done should at least guarantee ties of loyalty and good-will between the Church and the State".

The Holy Synod therefore requests that in the new Constitution: 1. "The Bulgarian Orthodox Church should be recognized as the institution of public rights" (in the terms of the proposed constitution the Church was not even mentioned); 2. "That it should be guaranteed that the Bulgarian Orthodox Church should be allowed its own constitution and government, freedom of worship, belief and instruction and also the right to carry on the Christian task of love to one's neighbour".

This was laid down in the memorandum, and attention was drawn to present-day circumstances and to the modern democratic States which have put this principle of separation of Church and State into effect. The memorandum also requires that in the new Constitution provision should be made "that the State should support the Church with the necessary material aid", "that civil marriage in being introduced should be regarded as voluntary", "that the education in State schools should be unbiased as regards philosophy of life, though the spirit of democracy and progress should be inculcated and that religious instruction as such should be permitted in schools".

If the last point is to be clearly understood, it should be remembered that for the past year in Bulgaria there has been no religious instruction given in all the State schools and that school prayers have also ceased, that as a general rule dialectic materialism has been accepted by teachers and pupil alike as a scientifically sound philosophy of life and that for this reason Sunday Schools organized by the Church and Sunday School teachers, who have always been priests at the present time, have been hindered in their work from different sides. Complaints have been made in the "Church Magazine", the official organ of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, and also in the "Shepherd of the People" (1.12.1946), the organ of the Bulgarian Orthodox Priests' Union, in which it is objected that the school authorities regard religious belief as a "mark of ill-breeding, wretchedness and narrowness of intellect", "that everywhere the priests are prevented from performing their duties in the newly opened Sunday Schools", and "that not infrequently anti-religious propaganda is carried on openly or secretly in the schools, when there are very few teachers or inspectors who do not subscribe to its teaching. The same may be said for the new State offices or professional Unions. There is so little paper available for the religious church press and literature, that practically no religious writings can be printed and most papers either cease publication altogether or appear infrequently. And the Church has no access to the radio. The Church has therefore great trials and tasks ahead. The large masses of the people, however, remain true to the Church and also public opinion is in great measure in favour of religion, Christianity and the Church. The numerous articles which appeared at Christmas and the New Year in a large portion of the daily press made this clear.

E.F.S. Geneva

GERMANY

To Clarify the Theological Situation

The Press Department of the Chancellery of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKID) published the following statement to clarify the theological situation:

"The planned amalgamation of a series of Lutheran Churches members of the EKID into one United Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Germany (see E.P.S. No. 6) will lead to vast consequences regarding order and formation of the Evangelical Church in Germany. Therefore, it is necessary that everything should be done to clarify the theological situation so that in the commencing discussion the front lines are as genuine as possible.

For this reason the leader of the Chancellery of the EKID, President Asmussen has asked some of the theological faculties in German universities for an opinion regarding the confessional question within the EKID. These opinions are to provide clarification of the following main questions:

1. What does it mean that a confession is 'valid'?
2. As each confessional fixation involves a separation as regards another understanding of the Gospel, what does the damnation of the Lutheran confessional literature mean, and how is the negation contained therein to be understood.

3. What meaning has the Barmen Declaration? Can one call it a confession? Does a confession generally and the Barmer Declaration especially have church founding character?

These questions, merely sketched in their main points, want to try and make the focus of the confessional discussion distinct. It is hoped that the opinions of the theological faculties, which are to be presented before the middle of April, will help to achieve a fruitful clarification."

E.P.S. Geneva

SWITZERLAND

Revision of the Geneva Convention

The International Committee of the Red Cross convened on March 3 and 4, 1947 at its headquarters on Avenue de la Paix in Geneva, an important conference of representatives of some 18 religious organizations to consider a number of proposed revisions in the "Geneva Convention". It is under the provisions of that "Convention" which was formulated in 1929 and which was ratified by 53 nations that the treatment of prisoners of war has been accorded during the recent World War.

The principal items under consideration at this conference were those relating to prisoners of war, civilian internees, the status and privileges of chaplains and clergymen and theological students serving in the army, and the relationship to the Red Cross of such agencies as the World Council of Churches, the Y.M.C.A., and the Y.W.C.A. and corresponding bodies representing Roman Catholics and Jews in their ministry through chaplains and otherwise to prisoners of war and internees. It is significant that the Red Cross has called into such a conference thus for the first time the representatives of religious organizations to secure their counsel in matters of this sort before they are brought to the attention of the powers for possible revision of the "Geneva Convention".

The World Council of Churches by invitation was represented both through the Department of Reconstruction and Inter-Church Aid and the Ecumenical Commission for Chaplaincy Service to prisoners of war. Several Jewish and Roman Catholic organizations were represented as were also the Y.M.C.A., Y.W.C.A., and the World Student Christian Federation. An excellent spirit prevailed.

E.P.S. Geneva

FRANCE

Ecumenical Assembly

The 12th of February is the day consecrated by the Orthodox Church to the commemoration of the three great hierarchs John Chrysostom, Basil the Great and Gregory of Nazianzes. This day was chosen by the Russian Theological Institute in Paris and the Committee for ecumenical relations of the Russian Church under the leadership of Archbishop Vladimir for their participation in the week of universal prayer. A solemn mass was celebrated in Greek, during which Archimandrite Cassian addressed the congregation exalting the three hierarchs as symbols of the unity of faith, creators of the theological doctrine of the Church and examples of courage in the fight with the mighty of this world. From the Roman Catholic Church there was a representative of the Archbishop of Paris, two Dominicans, two Benedictans, a Jesuit, an Oratorian and a Carthusian. Members of the Church of England, the Reformed Church of France and the Lutheran Church of France were also present. Among the speakers were Prof. Zander (Orthodox), Abbe Villain and Rev. Dumont (Roman Catholic), Rev. Neate (Anglican), Pastor Conord and Professor de Felice (Reformed).

E.P.S. Geneva

